

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1           1. A reinforced trim panel assembly for a vehicle body panel  
2 comprising:

3           a first trim panel member adjacent to a second trim panel member along  
4 a first seam; and

5           a reinforcement bracket disposed between said trim panel members and  
6 the vehicle body panels, and positioned over said first seam and secured to each  
7 of said first trim panel member and said second trim panel member using a  
8 fastening means, wherein said reinforcement bracket absorbs a force from an  
9 impact to said trim panel assembly to prevent separation of said first seam.

1           2. A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
2 said first trim panel member is generally planar and extends vertically and  
3 longitudinally a predetermined distance, and said second trim panel member is  
4 generally planar and extends vertically and longitudinally a predetermined  
5 distance.

1           3. A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
2 said reinforcement member is generally planar and has a shape corresponding  
3 to the shape of said integral first trim panel member and said second trim panel  
4 member, and also extends longitudinally and vertically a predetermined

5 distance, so that at least a portion of said first seam is covered by said  
6 reinforcement member.

1 4. A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 1 wherein  
2 said reinforcement bracket includes an energy absorption aperture for  
3 absorbing energy applied to said reinforcement bracket.

1 5. A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 4, wherein  
2 said energy absorbing aperture includes a longitudinally extending slot  
3 bisecting said energy absorbing aperture.

1 6. A trim panel as set forth in claim 1 wherein said  
2 fastening means is a screw.

1 7. A reinforced trim panel assembly attached to a body panel  
2 of a vehicle comprising:

3 a first trim panel member that is generally planar and extends vertically  
4 and longitudinally a predetermined distance;

5 second trim panel member adjacent to said first trim panel member  
6 along a first seam, and said second trim panel member is generally planar and  
7 extends vertically and longitudinally a predetermined distance; and

8           a reinforcement bracket disposed between said trim panel member and  
9           the vehicle body panels, and positioned over said first seam and secured to each  
10          of said first trim panel member and said second trim panel member using a  
11          fastening means, wherein said reinforcement member is generally planar and  
12          has a shape corresponding to the shape of said integral first trim panel member  
13          and said second trim panel member, and also extends longitudinally and  
14          vertically a predetermined distance, so that at least a portion of said first seam  
15          is covered by said reinforcement member, and said reinforcement bracket  
16          absorbs a force from an impact to said trim panel assembly to prevent  
17          separation of said first seam.

1                   8.     A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 7 wherein  
2                   said reinforcement bracket includes an energy absorption aperture for  
3                   absorbing energy applied to said reinforcement bracket.

1                   9.     A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 8, wherein  
2                   said energy absorbing aperture includes a longitudinally extending slot  
3                   bisecting said energy absorbing aperture.

1                   10.    A trim panel as set forth in claim 7 wherein said  
2                   fastening means is a screw.

1                    11.    A trim panel assembly attached to a body panel of a  
2    vehicle comprising:  
3                    a first trim panel member that is generally planar and extends vertically  
4    and longitudinally a predetermined distance;  
5                    a second trim panel member adjacent said first trim panel member along  
6    a first seam, and said second trim panel member is generally planar and extends  
7    vertically and longitudinally a predetermined distance;  
8                    a third trim panel member adjacent a lower edge of said second trim  
9    panel member along a second seam, and said third trim panel member is  
10   generally planar and extends vertically and longitudinally a predetermined  
11   distance; and  
12                    a reinforcement bracket disposed between said trim panel members and  
13   the vehicle body panels, and positioned over said first seam and said second  
14   seam, and secured to each of said first trim panel member, said second trim  
15   panel member, and said third trim panel member using a fastening means,  
16   wherein said reinforcement member is generally planar and has a shape  
17   corresponding to the shape of said integral first trim panel member, second trim  
18   panel member, and third trim panel member and also extends longitudinally  
19   and vertically a predetermined distance, so that at least a portion of said first  
20   seam and second seam is covered by said reinforcement member, and said  
21   reinforcement bracket absorbs a force from an impact to said trim panel  
22   assembly to prevent separation of said first seam.

1                    12.    A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 11 wherein  
2    said reinforcement bracket includes an energy absorption aperture for  
3    absorbing energy applied to said reinforcement bracket.

1                    13.    A trim panel assembly as set forth in claim 12, wherein  
2    said energy absorbing aperture includes a longitudinally extending slot  
3    bisecting said energy absorbing aperture.

1                    14.    A trim panel as set forth in claim 11 wherein said  
2    fastening means is a screw.

TTC-15002/08  
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